

The Campus of the University of Brasilia



The Pilot Plan of the new Brazilian Federal Capital, by Lucio Costa, was selected in a public competition held in 1957. The city was inaugurated barely three years later by President Juscelino Kubitschek, in April 1960, when the official creation of the University of Brasilia became a reality. Preparing to celebrate fifty years of existence, the University campus probably represents the most accomplished set of Brutalist architecture in the country and an excellent sample of the inventive resources of Brazilian architects. A functionalist city inside another. They are distinct from each other, but both dignified and worthy of documentation and preservation actions.

By Andrey Rosenthal Schlee

FOUNDED in 1960 and beginning to function in 1962, the University of Brasilia (UnB) was created based in a progressive conception of higher education. Occupying an immense area of 257 hectares between the Pilot Plan and the Lake Paranoá, its campus would also be innovative, having as a starting point a master plan by Lúcio Costa.

The task of raising from nothing the accommodations to shelter such a major institution in a brand-new town was assigned to the Center of Planning (Ceplan), a department of the School of Architecture and Urbanism (FAU). At the Ceplan, under the leadership of Oscar Niemeyer and with the help of João Filgueiras Lima—better known as Lelé, professors and their assistants, students and other professionals worked in close contact. The aim was to develop new forms of space organization, new structural alternatives and new construction technologies that would allow for the erection of flexible buildings in a very short time to lodge the most unanticipated activities as the campus was being built.

Undeniably, the Ceplan became a reference research center in these fields. And the tradition of team work and experimentalism then established is carried on until today.

1961–1965: starting from scratch

It was necessary to build much and quickly. Thus, the first phase of the campus architecture was distinguished—above all—by the adoption and/or development of pre-fabricated systems. Designing was frantic in that period. A variety of pre-molded pieces were created and tested directly in the construction sites, resulting in works of high importance for Brazilian modern architecture as the wooden *ocas*—or huts, by Sergio Rodrigues; the Faculty of Education, by Alcides Rocha Miranda; the general services pavilions and the minimum students housing, by Niemeyer; the residential complex Colina, by Filgueiras Lima.

The most audacious achievement in those early days would be a project by Niemeyer, concentrating several scientific institutes—mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology—in a single building tackling a complex program that included, in addition to classrooms and auditoriums, a wide range of scientific laboratories with disparate demands of areas and heights.

The Central Institute of Sciences is a low and linear building, slightly curved in plan, some 700 meters long and 60 meters wide. It comprises two parallel sections separated from each other by a landscaped strip of 15 meters. The west section is 25m wide and was intended to house, in its two floors and basement, amphitheatres and professors offices. The east facing east, 30 meters wide, has most of its area with double height and was set to house different kinds of laboratories and classrooms (with varying lengths). When carrying out the work, the east wing also gained a basement, intended for warehouses, accessible by stairs and an internal service road that runs throughout the building. For its construction, it was developed a system of pre-molded pieces of reinforced concrete, combining porches spaced every 3 meters; single anchor beams; T profile pre-stressed beams which span up to 30 meters; and pre-stressed paving slabs with 1 meter module. Longitudinally, the building is organized in three segments: two straight wings (north and south), linked by a bowed one. Between these three segments, two main accesses—handled as dry squares—pierce the building transversally. In each square, there is a cantilevered ramp, as if the architect's signature. The plastic strength of such elements, the soft curvature of the building, the rhythm proposed by the structural porches and the landscaped courtyards ensure a surprising and rich reading. Though still unfinished, the Central Institute of Sciences offers an exciting architectural promenade through its heroic length and surprising spaces.

In April 1964, Brazil was shattered by a military coup. In the same month the UnB was invaded by the political police. A succession of acts of force culminated in the dismantling in 1965 of the institution and the sacking—all



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Figure 1. **Oscar Niemeyer and João Filgueiras Lima.** Central Institute of Sciences. 1963-1971. Photo by Andrey Rosenthal Schlee, 2009

Figure 2. **Oscar Niemeyer and João Filgueiras Lima.** Central Institute of Sciences. 1963-1971. Photo by Cláudia Estrela Porto, 2010

Figure 3. **Paulo Zimbres and team.** University Presidency building. 1972-1975. Photo by Cláudia Estrela Porto, 2010

Figure 4. **João Filgueiras Lima.** Darcy Ribeiro Foundation, 2010. Photo by Cláudia Estrela Porto, 2011

at once—of 90% of its faculty, among them Niemeyer and his collaborators. Among its consequences, it precluded the course of architecture and, by extension, the Ceplan team was undone.

1968–1982: occupying the territory

Leaning on the mediation of the Brazilian Institute of Architects, the School of Architecture and Urban Planning was reopened in 1968. The arrival of another faculty opened a new chapter in the campus architectural history. From then on a second phase can be identified, characterized by the preponderant use of reinforced concrete as an expressive device. The new trend was launched with the Central Library building, by José Galbinski, Miguel Pereira, Jodete Rios Socrates and Waldir Aguiar.

There was a unmistakable change in architectural language, whose precedents were those from Rio de Janeiro and should be seek out—in most cases—in São Paulo or Porto Alegre. The period was characterized by intense construction activity, and most buildings of the period are of a Brutalism disposition, such as: the students dormitory, by Léo Bonfim Jr. and Alberto Fernando Xavier; the University Restaurant, by José Galbinski; and the Faculty of Applied Social Studies, by Matheus Gorovitz. Also from that period, the Center for Tropical Medicine, the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Technology College, all by Adilson Costa Macedo and Érico Weidle.

The University Presidency building, by Paulo de Melo Zimbres and Érico Weidle, offers a new level of relationship with the campus space. Envisioned as an “oasis”, it was built on low stilts, with pleasant gardens, and organized in split levels facing the campus in a welcoming way. Thought out as to enable future expansions, it shows the “simple and friendly” feeling claimed by Niemeyer.

1980–2000: more demands

Even though the 80's witnessed a dearth in the number of works, the quality level remained unaffected. While

keeping the practice of team work and sustained technological research, this third phase was differentiated by a greater diversity of aesthetic trends. The main characteristics were a constant structural experimentation; the erection of buildings outside the campus, and partnerships with the private sector, which now occupy areas in the campus. As representative of that moment, it should be mentioned the two multiple use pavilions, respectively by Érico Weidle and Paulo Bicca; the expansion of the residential complex Colina blocks, by Paulo Marcos Oliveira; the Center of Tourism, by José Zanine Caldas; and the Arts Complex, the João Calmon Pavilion and Anísio Teixeira Pavilion, all three by Claudio Queiróz.

A new millennium

Currently, a new generation of professors is giving its imprint to the campus. Among the recent additions are the Professors Association, by Raimundo Nonato Veloso; the Institute of Chemistry, by Aleixo Furtado and Marcílio Ferreira; the Institute of Biological Sciences, by Frederico Flósculo, Ivan do Valle, Oscar Ferreira, Cristine Autran, Eimara Messias, Nelton Borges e Vanessa Bhering; the Fiocruz Foundation, by Alberto Alves de Faria and team; and the School of Economics and Business Administration, by Márcio Buson, Andrey Schlee, Cláudia Garcia, Adalberto Vilela e Fabiano de Castro. Commemorating The last building to be concluded is the Darcy Ribeiro Foundation, by Lelé Filgueiras Lima, a technological reinterpretation of Brazilian native shelters conceived to receive the library, archives, and ethnographic funds of one of the university founders.

A functionalist city inside another one, preparing now to celebrate its half-century, the campus of the University of Brasília is an outstanding sample of the creativity of Brazilian architects. A respectable collection of buildings, each with its own character, worthy of documentation and preservations.

